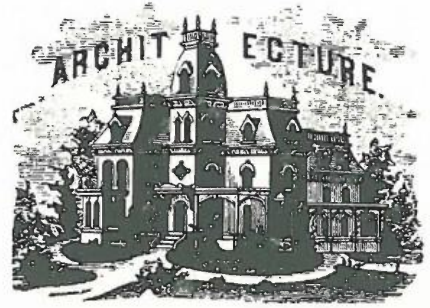


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Richard Morris Hunt
1827-1895

Richard Morris Hunt was considered the dean of American architects in the last half of the nineteenth century. The first American to be educated at the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts, he designed such landmarks as the New York Tribune Building (1876), Newport's "The Breakers" (Cornelius Vanderbilt Mansion, 1894-95), North Carolina's "Biltmore" (George W. Vanderbilt Mansion, 1892-95), and the Metropolitan Museum of New York (1894-95). Equally important, he trained such influential architects as Frank Furness, Henry Van Brunt, William R. Ware, Charles D. Gambrill, and George B. Post.¹

Hunt's single contribution to the architecture of Maine, however, was neither a seaside villa nor a cultural edifice. Rather it was the Portland Soldier's and Sailor's Monument (1888-91), one of more than fifteen monuments on which Hunt collaborated during his lifetime, setting a new standard for the art of public monuments.²

The public monument was very much a nineteenth century phenomenon. While markers of famous events or august personages had existed since the beginning of history, statues commemorating soldiers, statesmen, inventors, and philanthropists sprang up in every corner of Europe and the United States during the Victorian era. This was a culture which believed in Truth

and Beauty, Courage and Fidelity as clearly defined concepts, an era convinced that, in the words of an 1873 editorial in the *Portland Daily Press*, "It is proper that our cities should be adorned with works of art which will not only . . . cherish the recollection of exalted patriotism, but will tend to cultivate a taste for the beautiful and assist in the aesthetic education of the people."³

In Great Britain, the great flood of statuary was inspired by the Napoleonic Wars.⁴ In the United States, the impetus was provided by the Civil War and the urge to reassure those left to re-build the shattered nation as much as to remember those who had fallen. Maine's first public Civil War monument was dedicated on the green in Lewiston in 1868.⁵ Executed by young Maine sculptor Franklin Simmons (1839-1913), it consisted of a bronze infantryman with rifle at rest, set on a simple granite pedestal. In the following decades, this format was mass-produced by metal foundries and stone quarries for dozens of small towns in Maine and hundreds more throughout the country.

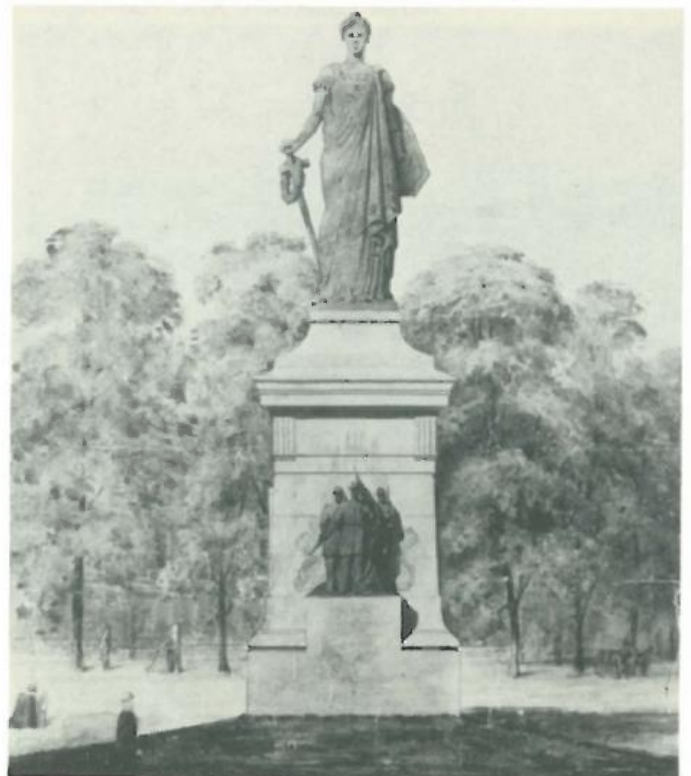


Figure 1. Rendering of Portland Soldier's and Sailor's Monument by Richard Morris Hunt, dated July 27, 1888 (Hunt Collection, AIA, Washington, D.C.).

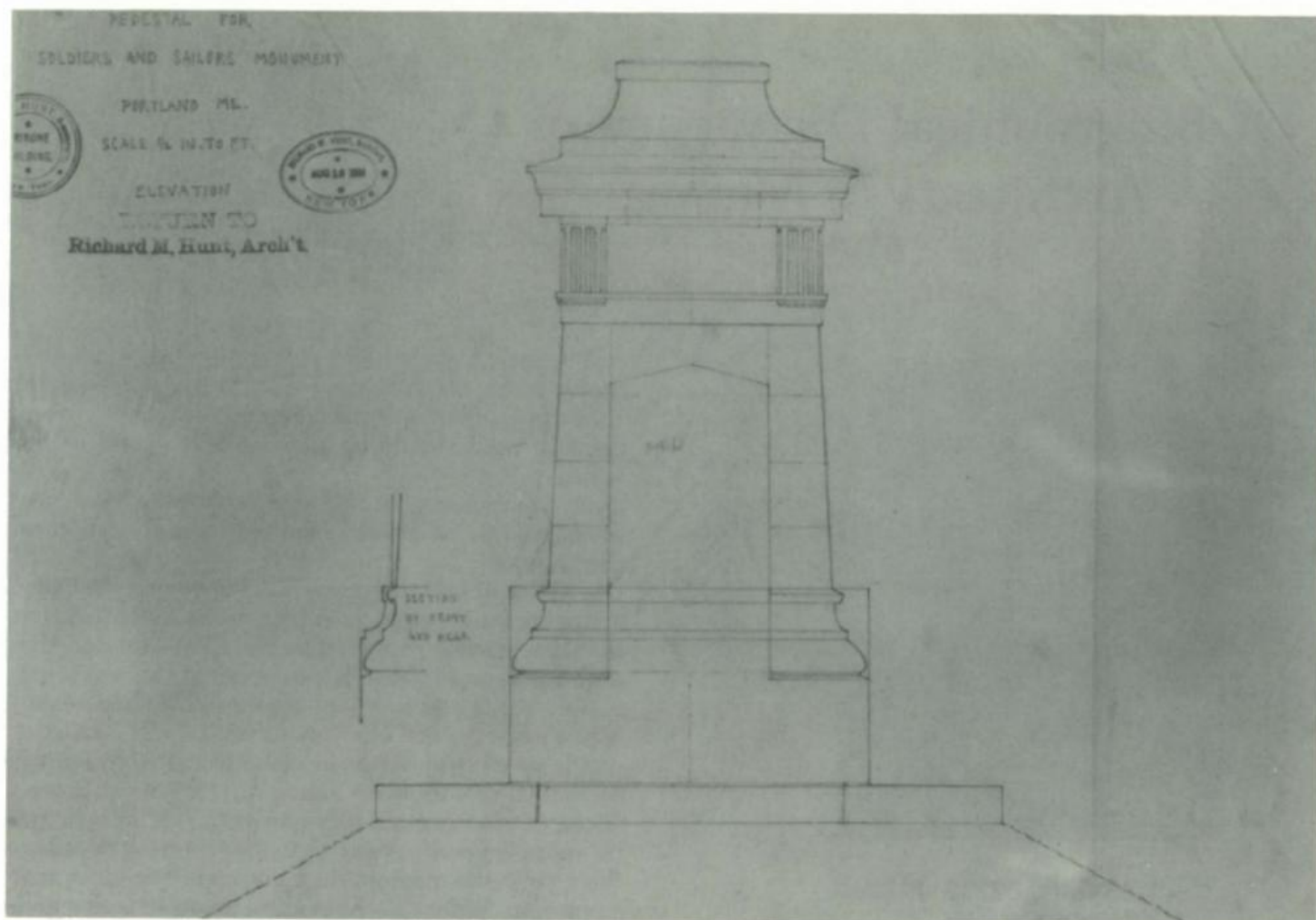


Figure 2. Elevation of Pedestal for Portland Soldier's and Sailor's Monument, dated August 15, 1888 (Hunt Collection, AIA, Washington, D.C.).

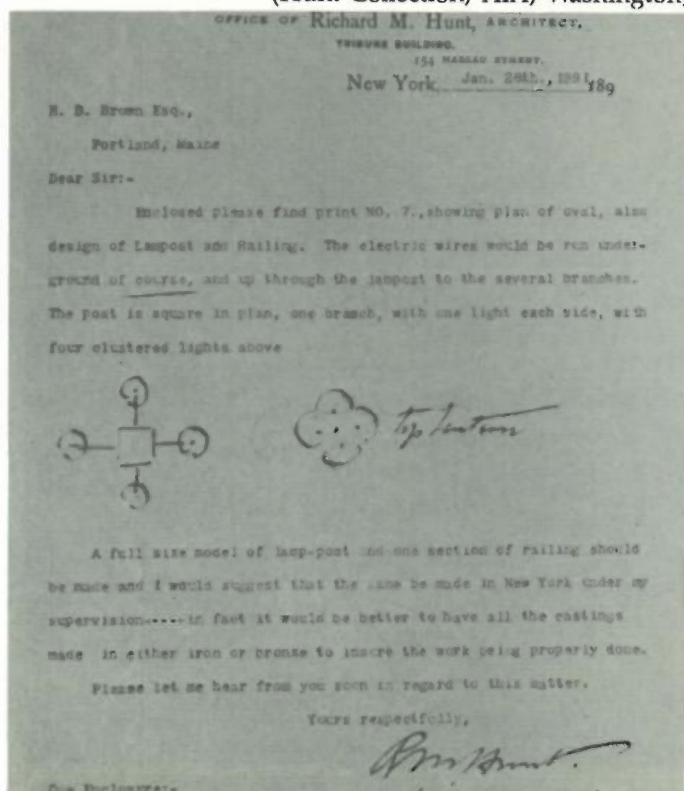


Figure 3. Sketch for Light Standards by Richard Morris Hunt, dated January 26, 1891 (Courtesy of Maine Historical Society).

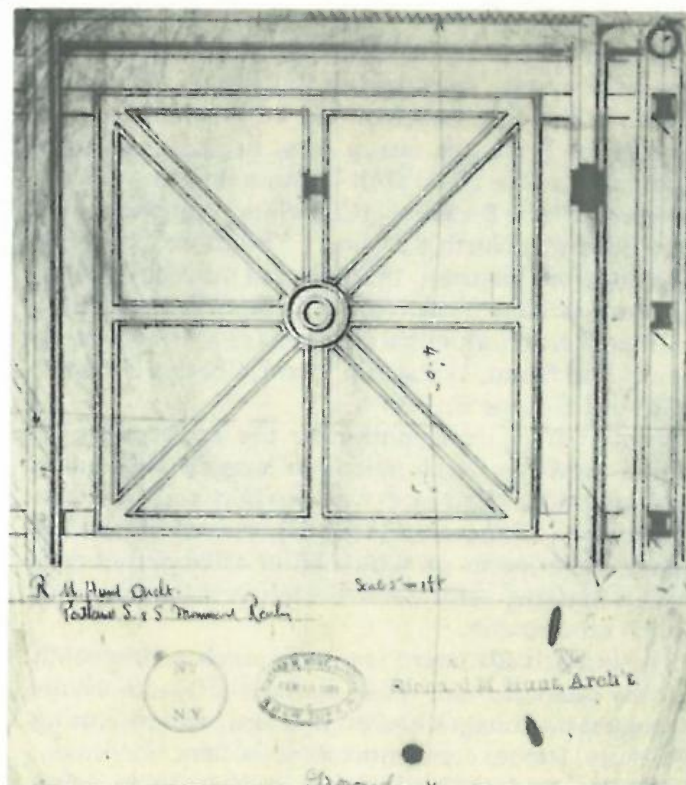


Figure 4. Elevation Detail of Fence by Richard Morris Hunt, dated February 19, 1891 (Courtesy of Maine Historical Society).



Figure 5. Portland Soldier's and Sailor's Monument, Monument Square, c. 1895 view (MHPC).

When Maine's largest city decided to erect its own memorial in the 1880's, the Design Committee set the stage for innovation by announcing a national competition among sculptors and architects and requesting that "the design should be architectural . . . instead of making the monument a mere pedestal for the display of figures."⁶ After years of debate, the project was awarded to Franklin Simmons in June of 1888. The sculptor, having gained the sophistication of nearly two decades of work in Rome, proposed a scheme radically different from the others: an allegorical figure symbolizing "the triumph of the Union" accompanied "not by a single statue of a soldier and sailor, but by a group of soldiers on one side and sailors on the other."⁷

Soon after receiving the commission, Simmons travelled to Newport, the summer home of Richard Morris Hunt.⁸ The sculptor considered the architect to have "as good taste in such matters as anybody we know in this country"⁹—and with good reason. Hunt had completed designs for a number of significant public works at that time, including the Yorktown Monument (Yorktown, Virginia, 1884) and the James Garfield Monument (Washington, D.C., 1887), both in collaboration with sculptor John Quincy Adams Ward, and the base for Frederick Auguste Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty (1886).¹⁰

A pedestal for statuary serves to isolate the artwork from its surroundings, like a picture frame. It must support the sculpture, both literally and visually, while not attracting any attention to itself. Hunt's three works demonstrated a range of ways to accomplish this delicate balance. The Yorktown Monument, designed with assistant Henry Van Brunt, presented a 28-foot high "Liberty" atop a column twice as tall embellish-

ed with relief sculpture.¹¹ The Garfield Monument showed the politician on a short, circular pedestal with three allegorical figures reclining at the base.¹² The Statue of Liberty, nearly 90 feet tall, required a 65-foot base to support and balance it. Built of rusticated blocks, embellished with an open loggia and Neo-Grec panels, shields and pilasters, the structure was really a building in its own right.¹³

The earliest sketches for the Portland Soldier's and Sailor's Monument, submitted by Hunt on June 24, 1888, show an allegiance to his base for the Statue of Liberty¹⁴ (Figure 1). The square pedestal was Doric-inspired, rising approximately 23 feet above a sloped pyramid of grass. The pedestal shaft was battered, surmounted by a plain frieze with triglyphs at each corner and simple cornice mouldings. The life-sized accessory figures were to rest on blocks projected up from the base. The statue of Victory, approximately 14 feet tall, rose from the pedestal cornice on a tapered stem, originally curved but later changed to a more substantial arrangement of tiers (Figure 2).

The Design Committee signed a contract for Hunt's services on August 18, 1888.¹⁵ The scheme altered little between that time and its completion, the major change being that of shifting the accessory groups from the front and rear to the two sides of the base. In the following year, Hunt provided designs for the bronze tablet on the rear face as well as four Beaux Arts-style lanterns (Figure 3) and a classically-inspired iron fence to surround the monument's oval base (Figure 4). Correspondence between Hunt and the Design Committee became somewhat heated over the design of the fence and suggests the tensions inherent in such projects. The Committee sent sketches for ornamental

cresting. The architect declared that it would be "out of keeping" with the style of the monument and added, "to prevent boys sitting on the top rail, I would suggest that raised points be cast on same—close, sharp points—this would be effective and not injurious to the design."¹⁶ Finally, the architect urged, "Believe me the simpler the railing is the better will be the effect."¹⁷

The lampposts and fence were manufactured by McGuier & Jones, the bronze tablets cast by the Ames Manufacturing Company of Chicopee, Massachusetts, and the granite pedestal furnished by the Maine and New Hampshire Granite Company.¹⁸ The cornerstone of the monument was laid on Memorial Day in 1889, but the sculpture did not arrive from Rome until May of 1891.¹⁹ The completed work was dedicated on October 25, 1891, with parades, fireworks, and a 54 gun salute²⁰ (Figure 5).

After finishing the Portland Monument, Simmons and Hunt collaborated on the Gen. John A. Logan Monument in Washington, D.C. (1892-1901), completed after the architect's death. The Soldier's and Sailor's Monument remains Hunt's only work in Maine, an achievement which has yet to be equalled in scale or concept by any other artist.

Pamela W. Hawkes
June, 1986

NOTES

- ¹ Paul R. Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt*, Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1980.
- ² *Ibid*, pp. 539-49.
- ³ *Portland Daily Press*, November 15, 1873.
- ⁴ Benedict Read, *Victorian Sculpture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 87.
- ⁵ *Lewiston Evening Journal*, February 28, 1868. See also Maine Civil War Centennial Commission, *Civil War Memorials Erected in Maine*, Augusta, 1965.
- ⁶ *Portland Daily Press*, July 18, 1887. See also Pamela W. Hawkes, "Our Lady of Victories," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly*, Fall 1980, pp. 79-99, for a description of the competition.
- ⁷ Portland Soldier's and Sailor's Association Records (hereafter cited as PSSA), June 14, 1888, Maine Historical Society.
- ⁸ In her unpublished biography of Hunt, his wife Catherine Clinton Howland Hunt noted a meeting between the two men in the fall of 1885 (letter from Paul R. Baker, October 1, 1985), but Hunt's drawings are dated as early as July 18th.
- ⁹ Simmons to H.B. Brown, PSSA Records, May 11, 1889.
- ¹⁰ Baker, pp. 302-22.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 203.
- ¹² *Ibid*, p. 309.

¹³ Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Statue of Liberty*, New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977, pp. 151-78.

¹⁴ The individual contributions of Hunt and Simmons to the overall concept of the monument are difficult to distinguish. Baker describes the working relationship between Hunt and J.Q.A. Ward as follows: "Hunt usually sketched out the general ideas of the design, planned the inscriptions and furnished drawings of the pedestal, while Ward created the sculptural figures." (Baker, p. 300). Simmons' statement before the Design Committee, however, had set forth the main concept for the Portland monument quite clearly, and the sculptor had previously designed two other major monuments without any known architectural input, The Peace Monument in Washington (1873) and the Roger Williams Monument in Providence (1877).

¹⁵ PSSA Records. Hunt was to get a 5% commission on the work, the cost not to exceed \$9,500. The final cost of the monument was \$35,891.64 (Maine Civil War Centennial, p. 54).

¹⁶ Hunt to Design Committee, PSSA Records, February 12, 1891.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, February 16, 1891.

¹⁸ PSSA Records, April 14, 1891 and September 28, 1888.

¹⁹ PSSA Records, June, 1889 and May 27, 1891.

²⁰ *Portland Sunday Times*, October 25, 1891.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY RICHARD MORRIS HUNT

Soldier's and Sailor's Monument, Monument Square, Portland,
1888-91, Extant.

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

Drawings for the Portland Soldier's and Sailor's Monument are in the collections of the American Institute of Architects in Washington, D.C. and the Maine Historical Society in Portland.

Photograph of Richard Morris Hunt from
The Architectural Record, October, 1895.

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